

REMARKS:

Claims 18-33 are pending in the application. Dependent claims 20, 25, and 28 are amended to correct minor informalities. Applicants request reconsideration and allowance in view of the above amendments and the following remarks.

Drawing Objection

The drawings are objected to for allegedly failing to show the first and second blanks being formed in a joint forging operation in which the second blank is formed to the same profile as the hat profile of the first blank, as recited in claim 24. That is incorrect. Such feature is shown in Figure 1 (step 15, via die plates 16 and 17); it is pre-forming the second blank in a separate forging operation, as recited in claim 23, that is not shown in the drawings (but which is referenced in paragraph [0033]). Accordingly, Applicants have provided a new Figure 1a, which shows the separate pre-forming step, and amended the specification accordingly to support that feature in claim 23. In view of this insertion of new Figure 1a, Applicants submit that the objection is overcome.

Claim Objection

Claim 25 is objected to for depending from a subsequent claim, i.e., claim 26. Claim 25 has been amended back to depending from claim 18, from which it originally depended. Accordingly, the objection is overcome.

Rejection Under 35 U.S.C. § 112

Claims 20-22 and 28 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 112, second paragraph, for minor informalities. The claims have been amended appropriately. Accordingly, Applicants request that the rejection be withdrawn.

Rejection Under 35 U.S.C. § 103

Claims 18-20 and 23 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) based on Winkler, et al., U.S. 3,793,703, in view of Bielefeldt, U.S. 3,697,725, and Lee, et al., U.S. 5,934,544. According to the Office Action, Winker shows all features of the claimed invention – including the first blank being heated to a working temperature and rolled (with reference to column 3, line 49) – but not heating the first blank in a furnace or directing the first blank between a pair of rollers having profiled surfaces. However, according to the Office Action, Bielefeldt discloses heating work-pieces in a furnace, and Lee discloses directing a blank through a pair of rollers having profiled surfaces to impart a desired shape to the work-piece. Therefore, according to the Office Action,

it would have been obvious to one having ordinary skill in the art at the time the invention was made to direct a first blank of Winkler through a furnace and to direct the first blank of Winkler between a pair of rollers having profiled surfaces, in light of the respective teachings of Bielefeldt and Lee, in order to heat the blank and impart the desired shape to the blank.

Applicants traverse the rejection as failing to set forth a *prima facie* case of obviousness.

In particular, all Winkler indicates is that the billet is “rolled and stretched to the preformed billet shape 3 shown in Fig. 2.” Such disclosure is completely ambiguous as to the nature of the rolling/stretching being conducted. For example, the billet could be rolled about a longitudinal axis (as on a lathe); rolling (along the length of the billet) could be done with rollers having flat contact surfaces that flatten – not shape – portions of the billet; the billet could be clamped at discrete locations and pulled to “neck down” portions between the clamps (thus yielding the bulging profile shown in Fig. 2); etc. Thus, it is completely unclear that the referenced rolling does anything at all like rolling with rollers having profiled surfaces, as recited in the claims. Given this uncertainty as to what the base reference shows (and the fact that the secondary references do nothing to remedy that certainty), it can not be said that the claims would have been obvious in view of the references.

Furthermore, Applicants submit that the Examiner’s proffered justification for making the asserted combination does not survive scrutiny. The essence of the Examiner’s logic is that Bielefeldt and Lee show X and Y, respectively, and that it would have been obvious to refer to

Bielfeldt and Lee to do X and Y. The Examiner fails, however, to establish why one having skill in the art would have been motivated to do X and Y to the Winkler workpiece – particularly in view of the ambiguity of Winkler pointed out above. Accordingly, the Examiner has failed to set forth a proper *prima facie* case of obviousness. Accordingly, the rejection must be withdrawn.

Allowable Subject Matter

Claims 24-27 and 29-33 are objected to as depending from rejected base claims but are otherwise indicated to be directed to allowable subject matter. In view of the foregoing, however, Applicants submit that all claims are in condition for allowance, and timely Notice to that effect is respectfully requested.

The undersigned representative requests any extension of time that may be deemed necessary to further the prosecution of this application.

The undersigned representative authorizes the Commissioner to charge any additional fees under 37 C.F.R. 1.16 or 1.17 that may be required, or credit any overpayment, to Deposit Account No. 14-1437, referencing Attorney Docket No.: 0173.038.PCUS01.

In order to facilitate the resolution of any issues or questions presented by this paper, the Examiner may directly contact the undersigned by phone to further the discussion.

Novak, Druce & Quigg, LLP
1000 Louisiana, Suite 5300
Houston, Texas 77002
(713) 571-3400
(713) 456-2836 (fax)
tracy.druce@novakdruce.com

Respectfully submitted,



Tracy W. Druce, Esq.
Reg. No. 35,493